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EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE PROGRAMME OF THE UNITED NATIONS
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Forty-fourth session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 487th MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Thursday, 7 October 1993, at 10 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. BODDENS-HOSANG (Netherlands)

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Statement by the Chairman of the UNHCR Staff Council

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

GENERAL DEBATE (agenda item 4) (continued)

1. Mr. NORDBY (International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA)) said that ICVA was concerned about the narrow way in which the definition of a refugee was being applied in many countries. Recognition as a refugee had come to depend as much on where the claim was made as on the nature of the danger fled. The gap between protection in the countries where the definition given in the 1951 Convention was narrowly applied and protection in Africa, where the definition contained in the Organization of African Unity Convention was applied, and Latin America, which applied the definition contained in the Cartagena Declaration, was particularly dramatic. In ICVA's view, the narrow application of the definition of a refugee could lead to the refoulement of genuine refugees. The 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol, if generously and humanely interpreted, could provide protection to many of those encompassed by the definitions given in the OAU Convention and the Cartagena Declaration. The African and Latin American definitions should be used to broaden the definition given in the 1951 Convention rather than to provide a contrast to it.

2. ICVA welcomed the fact that the High Commissioner, in her Note on International Protection (A/AC.96/815), had further refined the basic operational criteria for involvement in situations of internal displacement. ICVA agreed that, in certain situations, it was practically and morally untenable to make distinctions as to who should receive humanitarian assistance or protection on the basis of legal mandates derived from prior status rather than current need.

3. As far as protection and operation strategies were concerned, the United Nations had a long way to go in streamlining emergency management in complex humanitarian crises. Overlapping or unclear mandates, and even competition among agencies, created serious problems in too many cases and were prejudicial to the effective complementarity of the respective organizations. The United Nations Department of Humanitarian Affairs had improved its coordination capacity, but the division of labour between it and UNHCR still created uncertainty. ICVA recommended that UNHCR should more often play a lead agency role. In any case, NGO and United Nations agencies' activities needed to be better coordinated.

4. ICVA warmly welcomed the High Commissioner's establishment of the Partnership in Action (PARINAC) process. The invitation to attend a series of regional conferences, which would serve as a basis for discussion at a global NGO/UNHCR conference to be held in Oslo in June 1994, was a timely initiative. With an ever-growing number of refugees and a rapidly changing environment for humanitarian engagement, there was an urgent need to assess present NGO/UNHCR partnerships and further develop existing and new concepts for the future. The four themes - refugee protection, internally displaced persons, emergencies, and relief, rehabilitation and development - would allow for a thorough discussion of all important aspects of NGO/UNHCR cooperation in refugee work. ICVA believed that the PARINAC process would lead to a consolidated plan of action for the future implementation of the NGO/UNHCR partnership. All States were therefore urged to give strong support to the

process and to the improvement of the partnership in future NGO/UNHCR action. ICVA strongly opposed the allegations that NGOs supported terrorism and failed to support migrants in their own countries.

5. ICVA welcomed UNHCR's formulation of a policy on refugee children and the revision of the 1988 Guidelines on Refugee Children. Since then, the Convention on the Rights of the Child had been adopted and, by September 1993, an unprecedented number of States had either acceded to it or ratified it. The Convention was a most important instrument in protecting children's rights, including those of refugee and internally displaced children.

6. Notwithstanding the progress made by many States and UNHCR in dealing with serious problems which threatened refugee women, the human rights and specific protection and assistance needs of refugee women needed continued and focused attention. Refugee women must be involved in the planning and delivery of services at every stage of a refugee crisis. ICVA urged that immediate measures should be taken to implement the UNHCR Policy on Refugee Women and the Guidelines on the Protection of Refugee Women.

7. Despite encouraging developments in some of the countries in the region, Africa continued to host huge numbers of refugees and displaced populations. In fact, with the exception of Eritrea, the list of countries that appeared regularly in ICVA's statements to the Executive Committee had remained unchanged. ICVA was greatly concerned about the international community's declining interest in a continent that had previously been praised for its generous hospitality and commitment to refugees and asylum-seekers. It therefore commended the High Commissioner on her assurance of continued support to African refugees.

8. At present, there was an increasing spontaneous repatriation from Malawi to Mozambique. The returning refugees were in dire need of basic commodities and services and adequate measures had not been taken by the international community to meet those requirements. While recognizing the enormous tasks already undertaken by UNHCR, ICVA would urge that more should be done to begin assisted repatriation from Malawi immediately. Postponement of the operation until May 1994 was not acceptable.

9. Afghanistan was still in a state of turmoil. The civil war was continuing and no central Government had been established following the collapse of the communist regime. Human rights violations were widespread, the civilian population was under attack and houses were being looted or burned down. In the light of that situation, UNHCR should reconsider its mass repatriation programmes to Afghanistan.

10. ICVA and the European Consultation on Refugees and Exiles had spoken out against restrictive and deterrent policies in Europe because of their shared conviction that such policies were not in keeping with the ethical, legal and practical requirements that must underpin any comprehensive and generous refugee policy. NGOs looked to the Executive Committee to encourage a principled approach by European States to the development of a comprehensive refugee policy. Current policies in western European States might turn eastern and central Europe into a dumping-ground for rejected asylum-seekers.

11. With winter and continuing war ahead, it was realistic to expect an increase in forced migration from the former Yugoslavia into western Europe. However, the Governments concerned had no scenario prepared for burden-sharing or for an orderly reception of the refugees. NGOs called upon western European States to meet the needs of the victims of the war in the former Yugoslavia.

12. ICVA also wished to draw attention to the humanitarian and development crises in the newly independent States. It was necessary that more funding should be made available to meet current needs and for longer-term development programmes and that the relevant specialized agencies of the United Nations system should establish a permanent presence and programmes in the newly independent States. NGOs and bilateral aid organizations should likewise increase their presence there.

13. ICVA urged the Governments of Central America, the Governments of donor countries, national and international non-governmental organizations, United Nations institutions and UNHCR to renew their support to Central America and Mexico beyond May 1994 in the context of CIREFCA. The treatment of Haitian boat people, especially by the United States Government, represented a clear violation of internationally agreed standards. ICVA commended UNHCR on its earnest efforts to carry out its protection mandate on behalf of Haitian refugees.

14. In solving the problems of refugees and displaced persons, the sponsors of the Middle East peace talks were urged to take into consideration the particularities of each of the countries involved. Any durable solution should be based on respect for the rights of their populations and the right to return should be recognized for Palestinian refugees beyond the territories of Gaza and Jericho.

15. At the same time, ICVA was concerned about UNHCR's attempts to raise funds in the private sector. By doing so, it competed with NGO fund-raising for refugees. ICVA therefore called on UNHCR not to engage in any fund-raising in the private sector without prior coordination with NGOs.

16. In conclusion, ICVA expressed its respect for the High Commissioner, who had so often and so rightly stressed that the solution of the world's refugee problems lay in universal adherence to fundamental human rights standards.

17. Mr. MAJOLA (Pan-Africanist Congress of Azania (PAC)) thanked UNHCR for actively participating in the programme to facilitate the return of South African political exiles after 4 September 1991, as well as all donors that had made it possible to allocate a sum of 54 million rand to the programme. It should, however, be remembered that the South African regime had not yet granted a general amnesty to all South African exiles. Consequently, some returnees had been arrested on their return, while others had simply disappeared, only the regime knowing what had happened to them. Many of the returnees had been subjected to State-sponsored harassment.

18. Some of the exiles had gone abroad in the early 1960s following the Sharpeville massacre. The next wave of refugees had left after the Soweto uprising in June 1976. Many had thus many had spent over a decade in exile.

During that period, family members had changed locations and addresses, with the result that, in many instances, returning exiles found it difficult and expensive to trace their next of kin.

19. Very little baggage allowance was given to returnees, adding to their resettlement problems. A returnee was not assured of a home on return and had no employment to go to and no security. Those factors had a telling effect on returnees and many became disillusioned. He welcomed the agreement between UNHCR and the Government of South Africa regarding the return of Mozambican refugees.

20. The major task with regard to the resettlement and reintegration of returnees was the urgent need to involve them and to supply sustenance. One objective was to provide them with education at different levels. At present, the Batlagae Trust, which catered for the educational and related needs of all returning scholars and students, had the principal aim of providing bursaries to eligible returnees. The main problem in that regard was the availability of resources. The Trust currently needed 8.5 million rand to cope adequately with the situation for the coming period, representing an average spending of 3,300 rand per person on an estimated number of 2,600 beneficiaries for the year 1994.

21. Another important matter of immediate concern was development assistance, employment and training opportunities. Short-term vocational training, income-generating projects and initial assistance to facilitate pioneering projects were all priorities at the moment. PAC thanked the European Community for having pledged more than 10 million rand in 1992 for development assistance, only 25 per cent of which had so far been utilized.

22. A Reintegration and Development Trust had been set up to provide development assistance to all returnees and other marginalized communities in South Africa. Its components were PAC, ANC and eminent persons in the community. It urgently needed resources in order to carry out its mandate effectively. It had a projected budget of approximately 25 million rand. PAC sincerely hoped that the international community would do everything in its power to ensure continued support for the reintegration of returnees by enabling the Trust to implement its plan.

23. PAC also thanked the High Commissioner for making an additional contribution to development and training. It noted with appreciation the donation of a multi-purpose training centre which would benefit the entire marginalized community.

24. PAC was grateful to UNHCR for having shown concern about the situation of women and children in South Africa and for having provided its legal umbrella to UNICEF to enable it to continue its presence in the country. A situation analysis report on women and children in South Africa had been produced by UNICEF together with the National Children's Rights Committee, which faced an enormous challenge, since most victims of violence in South Africa were women and children. As the elections approached, violence was likely to escalate next year and former prisoners and returnees might be the most targeted. Consequently, UNHCR should maintain its offices in neighbouring countries.

25. Education, development assistance in the form of training and employment opportunities, as well as housing, were the priorities for political returnees. Those vital issues must be adequately dealt with if the transitional period for the democratization process was to be smooth and relatively peaceful. PAC was confident that favourable consideration would be given to its requests.

26. The CHAIRMAN, summing up the general debate, noted that many speakers had commended the performance of the High Commissioner and her staff over the past year, particularly staff in the field, who were working in increasingly difficult and often dangerous circumstances.

27. Many delegations had pointed out that 1993 had been the most dramatic year that UNHCR had faced in its history. The multiplication of conflicts had put increasing pressure on established international norms such as the institution of asylum and respect for international humanitarian law. There was a potential for additional massive movements of population in various parts of the world. The burden imposed by the massive presence of refugees had been made clear in a number of eloquent statements by the representatives of hard-pressed countries of asylum in the developing world.

28. Speakers had repeatedly drawn attention to the need to deal with the multiple causes of refugee movements through innovative strategies that were capable of adjustment to changed international circumstances. The emphasis placed by the High Commissioner on preventive and solution-oriented activities had been particularly welcomed. At the same time, the limits of humanitarian action had been stressed and the need for effective and concerted political initiatives had been emphasized.

29. As the number of asylum-seekers continued to grow, the need to preserve the institution of asylum was seen as being of crucial importance. Speakers had reiterated their commitment to their international obligations to provide protection for refugees and others with a justifiable claim to special humanitarian consideration. Nevertheless, the asylum system was also coming under mounting pressure from abusive claims. A number of speakers had drawn attention to the urgent need for a comprehensive approach to refugees and migration in order to relieve strains on the asylum institution. Attention had also been drawn to the need for further systematic thinking on the concept of safe countries of origin or asylum in order both to avoid disruptive movements of asylum-seekers and to ensure that refugees were protected against possible refoulement. The need for fair and fast procedures for the determination of refugee status had also been stressed, as had the need for innovative approaches, including temporary protection. A number of other protection concerns had been raised, prominent among them being the concern to provide for the protection of refugee women and children.

30. Repatriation had been repeatedly reaffirmed as the most satisfactory solution to refugee problems. Attention had been drawn, however, to various constraints on repatriation in a number of regions. They included security considerations, the lack of adequate resources and the need to work for more comprehensive integration measures. The development of voluntary repatriation guidelines by UNHCR had been welcomed.

31. Many speakers had also welcomed UNHCR's increased focus on preventive measures designed to avert or contain refugee flows. The importance of respect for human rights, good governance and the promotion of sustainable development had been referred to by various delegations. Early warning capacity and mass information programmes, it had been suggested, were important elements of a preventive strategy. Attention had also been drawn, however, to the limits of prevention and to the consequent need for emergency preparedness.

32. The internally displaced had figured prominently in the debate. Concern had been expressed about the dimensions of the problem and the potential for further deterioration. There had been a broad measure of support for the High Commissioner's criteria for UNHCR's involvement in situations of internal displacement, but different views had been expressed on the precise extent of the Office's role in such situations. While action in favour of internally displaced persons could be seen as an important preventive activity, there had been some concern that UNHCR's mandate should not be overstretched. The issue of national sovereignty had also been raised by a number of delegations. There had been a suggestion that the Sub-Committee of the Whole on International Protection should study further the question of internally displaced persons in order to clarify UNHCR's involvement. The subject could also be discussed at a joint meeting of the two Sub-Committees.

33. In view of the scale of current humanitarian emergencies, the need for coordination both within and outside the United Nations system had been repeatedly stressed. Appreciation had been expressed for the High Commissioner's strategy of building partnerships. A need was clearly felt to develop a culture of cooperation which would take account of comparative advantages. Many delegations had welcomed the Partnership in Action Programme (PARINAC).

34. The importance the High Commissioner attached to the development of linkages between humanitarian, political and peace-keeping processes had been widely endorsed, as had linkages with development institutions to ensure the continuum from relief to development. Nevertheless, with regard to linking up with political initiatives, repeated mention had been made of the need to maintain UNHCR's strictly humanitarian mandate and the impartiality of humanitarian assistance.

35. A number of delegations had stressed that it was important for UNHCR to develop management skills in order to respond effectively to the complex challenges it faced. Mention had been made of the need to maintain and enhance administrative structures.

36. The rapid increase in UNHCR's budgetary requirements as it faced new emergency situations around the world had led a number of delegations to stress the importance of widening the donor base in order to ensure that adequate resources could be obtained. Generous new pledges had been made in the course of the session by a number of donors, for which UNHCR was very grateful.

(a) REVIEW OF UNHCR PROGRAMMES FINANCED BY VOLUNTARY FUNDS IN 1992-1993; ADOPTION OF THE 1994 GENERAL PROGRAMMES AND BUDGET

(b) STATUS OF CONTRIBUTIONS AND OVERALL FINANCIAL REQUIREMENTS FOR 1992 AND 1993

(c) ADMINISTRATION AND MANAGEMENT (agenda item 5) (A/AC.96/808, Parts I to VI, 810, 811, 812, 812/Add.1, 813 and 816)

37. Mr. WALZER (Acting Deputy High Commissioner), introducing agenda item 5, said that information on UNHCR's programme for 1992-1993 and the projections for 1994 were set out in document A/AC.96/808, Parts I-VI. Total activities for 1993 under both General and Special Programmes were expected to cost around US$ 1.27 billion. Two thirds of those activities related to Special Programmes, many to promote voluntary repatriation. Budgetary estimates for General Programmes for 1993 remained at US$ 413.6 million. Although additional needs had been revealed since the Committee had approved those targets, they had been accommodated within the approved level.

38. As to 1994, the initial budgetary estimates for General Programmes stood at US$ 418,523,000. That amount included provisions for the Emergency Fund and the General Allocation for Voluntary Repatriation, as well as a Programme Reserve for 1994 amounting to US$ 33.9 million. The Executive Committee's formal approval was being sought for that 1994 General Programme target, to be implemented subject to availability of funds. The 1994 General Programme needs would be reviewed again in late 1993 and the members of the Executive Committee would be informed of any major changes and of progress in implementation.

39. Some of the most important Special Programmes were for the former Yugoslavia and Afghanistan and the Comprehensive Plan of Action for Indo-Chinese Refugees. In comparison to the amounts indicated in Table V.3 of document A/AC.96/813, estimated needs for 1993 had been revised downwards, mainly because of difficulties in implementing some of the Special Programmes, changes in planning assumptions and delayed receipt of contributions. Upward revisions had been made however, for African repatriation programmes, in the Horn of Africa and West Africa. The estimates for 1994 Special Programmes must be regarded as particularly tentative. UNHCR was preparing a comprehensive update of Special Programme estimates for 1994 which it expected to submit in mid-December 1993.

40. With regard to funding, UNHCR would be asking the Executive Committee to approve the 1994 General Programmes budgetary target and attached great importance to full funding of that target. The resources made available would be carefully managed and, where necessary, priorities among programmes would be set.

41. The sustained support of member States was still required to carry many humanitarian programmes through to the end of 1993. In early September, income had stood at US$ 680.5 million. The contributions announced since then had brought the overall level for 1993 to around US$ 1 billion.

42. For 1994, while it was anticipated that some major programme needs would decline, for example, in Cambodia and South-East Asia, it would hardly be realistic to assume that overall requirements in the humanitarian sector would diminish significantly. The High Commissioner greatly appreciated the efforts made by both asylum and donor countries in supporting UNHCR. Given the priority attached to the General Programmes, UNHCR requested that contributions should be announced early, especially at the Pledging Conference.

43. Referring to administration and management, he said the High Commissioner was committed to enhancing UNHCR's operational capacity, performance and accountability. A number of initiatives had been proposed, including those aimed at improving programming and at establishing solid administrative and financial support systems, particularly in the early stages of emergencies. With rapidly growing demands on the Office and an ever-changing operational environment, UNHCR had to be ever more creative and vigilant to ensure that the right systems and controls were in place. The safety of staff was of special concern to the High Commissioner. In cooperation with the United Nations Secretariat, steps had been taken to address that issue more fully. The number and gravity of security incidents were increasing, however, and UNHCR would look for the support of member States in raising the issue in the General Assembly and the Security Council.

44. In conclusion, he expressed gratitude for the support and guidance the Executive Committee had given to the deliberations of the Sub-Committee on Administrative and Financial Matters over the past year.

45. The CHAIRMAN, noting that the Sub-Committee on Administrative and Financial Matters had already adopted its report as contained in document A/AC.96/820, said that if he heard no objection, he would take it that the Executive Committee also wished to adopt the report.

46. It was so decided.

47. The CHAIRMAN invited the Executive Committee to consider the programmes dealt with in document A/AC.96/808.

48. Mr. SAENZ CARRETE (Observer for Mexico), referring to document A/AC.96/808 (Part IV), said that his country worked in close cooperation with UNHCR in an effort to improve the protection and well-being of the refugee population.

49. While the statistics given in paragraph 4.5.1 were close to the reality, that was not true of the figures contained in paragraph 4.5.6. During 1992 and 1993, all persons involved in refugee care had been pleased to see that humanitarian assistance aimed at promoting development activities could produce beneficial results. As a result of the design and implementation of the Multi-Year Plan, refugees in Campeche and Quintana Roo had begun to achieve food self-sufficiency at the end of 1982. However, additional inputs were necessary in order to move from an emergency situation to a development situation. In that connection, his delegation supported the General and Special Programmes submitted by UNHCR for 1994.

50. Referring to paragraph 4.5.7 on eligibility criteria for the granting of refugee status, he said that, on 17 September 1993, a new procedure had been adopted to make possible an appropriate change in the status of all refugees.

51. With regard to paragraph 4.5.9, the registration of all refugee children born in Mexico had been completed in Chiapas with the issue of 9,220 birth certificates.

52. Mr. BENHIMA (Morocco) stressed that UNHCR's programme evaluation systems and procedures should be improved in order to ensure the effectiveness and profitability of self-sufficiency activities and to guarantee the well-being of refugees. In that context, he referred to document A/AC.96/808 (Parts V and VI) and, in particular, the paragraphs on Western Saharan refugees. His delegation once again rejected the figure of 165,000 which was given and which it had on repeated occasions described as exaggerated. He recalled that, according to the very broad estimates made by the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO), those persons, including children, did not number more than 65,000. According to authoritative, neutral and impartial sources, that figure would be much lower if the conditions for strict identification were met. His delegation noted that the figure of 165,000 had never been confirmed by UNHCR and that it could not be adopted as a basis for estimating requirements, since it was well known that the operation for the identification and counting of Western Saharans had not yet been completed.

53. Mr. SWIFT (Ireland) said that, subject to the completion of its normal budgetary procedures, Ireland planned to increase its contribution to the UNHCR core General Programme by some 60 per cent in 1994 i.e. to approximately US$ 1,250,000, in line with the request made by the High Commissioner. It also hoped to increase its support for the Special Programmes.

54. He associated his delegation with the concern expressed by the High Commissioner and other UNHCR spokesmen about the deterioration in the security situation for UNHCR field staff. Ireland, whose people had a long tradition of service in both United Nations peace-keeping and humanitarian operations, had always ranked the safety of personnel as a priority. It hoped that other countries would respect the neutrality of UNHCR field operations and do all in their power to ensure the safety of staff working in humanitarian operations.

55. He endorsed the view that refugee flows often had at their source grave violations of human rights and that effective prevention therefore had to be closely linked to action aimed at protecting those fundamental rights and freedoms.

56. XU LIUGEN (China) said that the figure given in the second sentence of paragraph 2.3.18 of document A/AC.96/808 (Part II) should be changed to read "546". By the end of the current year, moreover, some 400 refugees would be repatriated, thereby concluding the voluntary repatriation programme involving those refugees.

57. The CHAIRMAN suggested that the Executive Committee should adopt the proposals relating to General Programmes summarized in paragraph 81 of

document A/AC.96/813, as amended by paragraph 27 of document A/AC.96/820. Those proposals were:

(a) That the Executive Committee should approve the revised country and area programmes and the overall allocations of the 1993 General Programmes which remained at the already approved target of US$ 413,658,000;

(b) That the Executive Committee should approve the country and area programmes and the overall allocations for the 1994 General Programmes amounting to US$ 418,523,000 (including US$ 25 million for the Emergency Fund and US$ 20 million for the General Allocation for Voluntary Repatriation), as contained in document A/AC.96/808 (Parts I-VI) and as included in column (8) of Summary Table 2 of document A/AC.96/813, recognizing that, given the current proposed estimates for Special Programme activities for 1994, overall estimated financial requirements would amount, subject to the availability of funds, to approximately US$ 1.2 billion;

(c) That the Executive Committee should authorize the High Commissioner to effect such adjustments in projects, country or area programmes and overall allocations as might be required by changes affecting the refugee programmes for which they were planned, using the General Programmes Reserve where necessary, and to report such adjustments to the Executive Committee at its forty-fifth session in October 1994;

(d) That the Executive Committee should approve the transfer in 1994 of up to US$ 300,000 from the Programme Reserve to the Fund for International Field Staff Housing and Basic Amenities.

58. If he heard no objection, he would take it that the Executive Committee adopted those proposals.

59. It was so decided.

TRIBUTE TO THE MEMORY OF UNHCR STAFF KILLED IN THE LINE OF DUTY

60. Mr. ISHAK (Chairman, UNHCR Staff Council) paid a tribute to the memory of UNHCR staff killed in the line of duty.

61. At the invitation of the Chairman, the members of the Executive Committee observed a minute of silence.

STATEMENT BY THE CHAIRMAN OF THE UNHCR STAFF COUNCIL

62. Mr. ISHAK (Chairman, UNHCR Staff Council) noted that, in the decisions it would adopt at its forty-fourth session, the Executive Committee would be requesting the High Commissioner to take certain actions and implement certain mandates. Yet the High Commissioner did not perform those tasks single-handedly: the members of the UNHCR staff carried them out and would continue to do so in future with vigour and dedication. Staff welfare and morale were of critical importance to the success of the High Commissioner's programme and it would be unwise and, surely, unfair if the dedication of the staff was taken for granted.

63. At the request of the Executive Committee, the Staff Council had submitted to the forty-second and forty-third sessions detailed reports on issues of concern. The staff was grateful that the High Commissioner had repeatedly affirmed her determination to resolve outstanding issues of human resource management in UNHCR and it was impatient to see the implementation of long-awaited improvements relating to working conditions and career development opportunities. Unfortunately, the good intentions of the Executive Committee and the High Commissioner had not been translated into action by the responsible Divisions.

64. The past year should have been dedicated to the development of a human resources management strategy that responded to the increased complexity of operational requirements and at the same time offered improved career development opportunities to the staff. Studies and surveys carried out by various task forces and working groups tended to corroborate the views expressed by the Staff Council in its reports to the forty-second and forty-third sessions of the Executive Committee. But as documentation and reports piled up, it was legitimate to ask when action would be taken.

65. Since early 1993, there had been a breakdown in dialogue between the Staff Council and the Division of Human Resources Management. The necessary strategy had not been established and none of the reports had been put into practical implementation. The only exception to that rule had been the revamping of the 1985 Regulations governing the Appointment, Posting and Promotion Board of staff in the Professional category. Even that would not have been possible without the exceptional efforts made by the Acting Deputy High Commissioner, whose commitment to frank discussion and sincere cooperation had been much appreciated by all the staff representatives. Yet even the support of the High Commissioner, including her much appreciated availability to discuss issues of concern, could not replace continuous dialogue with the Division of Human Resources Management.

66. There had been a trend not to engage in mandatory consultations with the Staff Council on important staff issues and a lack of transparency in many administrative actions. Under the pretence of the need to respond to emergencies, the Division had paid little heed to established principles of equity, fair play and justice. That unfortunate attitude had manifested itself most clearly in respect of the appointment, posting and promotion of staff. An increasing number of allegations of administrative irregularities, violations of staff rules and arbitrary decision-making had been raised by staff members. The High Commissioner had ordered an outside inquiry by a consultant on those allegations and had published the inquiry report in its entirety. That had been a significant step towards achieving greater transparency in the work of the Division of Human Resources Management. The consultant had confirmed 12 instances of irregularities affecting almost all aspects of human resources management in UNHCR.

67. Appeal cases involving UNHCR staff accounted for one third of all those received by the Geneva Joint Appeals Board. The Board had recently recommended the payment of thousands of dollars in financial compensation to appellants in compensation for damage suffered. Those funds could have been used to assist thousands of refugees. Such a waste of resources could be substantially reduced through proper and fair management practices.

68. Staff members expected their contribution to be recognized and to be justly treated. They were capable and dedicated, but also diverse in terms of culture, education and family constraints. The successful completion of a UNHCR programme meant a new, dignified life for refugees, but should not mean an abrupt end for the careers of those who had made such successes possible. The services of some of the most experienced and dedicated staff members had recently been terminated without appropriate notice, causing tremendous hardship to them and their families. Policies and plans must be developed to deal humanely with such situations.

69. The level of hardship and occupational stress to which the staff was exposed required careful studies and should be fully taken into consideration in all human resources management policies. Equal treatment was not just a question of entitlements or allowances. Staff members were required to serve in stressful situations under conditions of physical danger and emotional strain and often to be separated from their families. They had to make personal sacrifices and work long hours, far beyond the financial compensation provided. General Service staff at headquarters and local staff in the field, who represented the backbone and institutional memory of UNHCR, had many concerns that remained unanswered. The low priority accorded to the improvement of their working conditions remained a source of grave concern to the Staff Council.

70. The continuing media attacks on the United Nations in general and UNHCR staff in particular indicated the public's frustration over examples of mismanagement, waste and corruption. Although there could be some truth in what the media reported, that kind of lopsided publicity affected the morale of honest staff members. Corruption must be eradicated and incompetent staff not tolerated. The top-heavy structures put in place or being proposed, such as an expanded audit unit, senior management advisers, an ombudsman or a new Office of the Inspector General would not suffice to prevent waste. The staff at large must be the first line of defence against fraud, waste and abuse and would always be the most effective enforcement authority. Care must be taken to assure that those who drew attention to corruption were protected from reprisals. The Staff Council had decided to issue a staff newspaper, which it believed would have a preventive impact in such matters. The newspaper was produced entirely out of voluntary contributions from the staff.

71. Offices with controlling functions such as the Controller and the Division of Human Resources Management must do more than prevent failure: they must encourage success. Given the magnitude and pace of change in the world and in UNHCR's role, the need for creativity and innovation and an ability successfully to accommodate change were fundamental to the Office's effectiveness. There should be no scope for ambiguity and managers should be held truly accountable.

72. The staff was hopeful that the future would be better and it would continue to strive for improvements. It pledged its full cooperation in carrying out the responsibilities the Executive Committee would entrust to the High Commissioner.

The meeting rose at 11.45 a.m.